

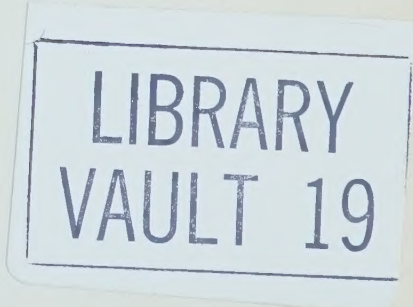
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# Social Reporting in Alberta: Problems and Prospects

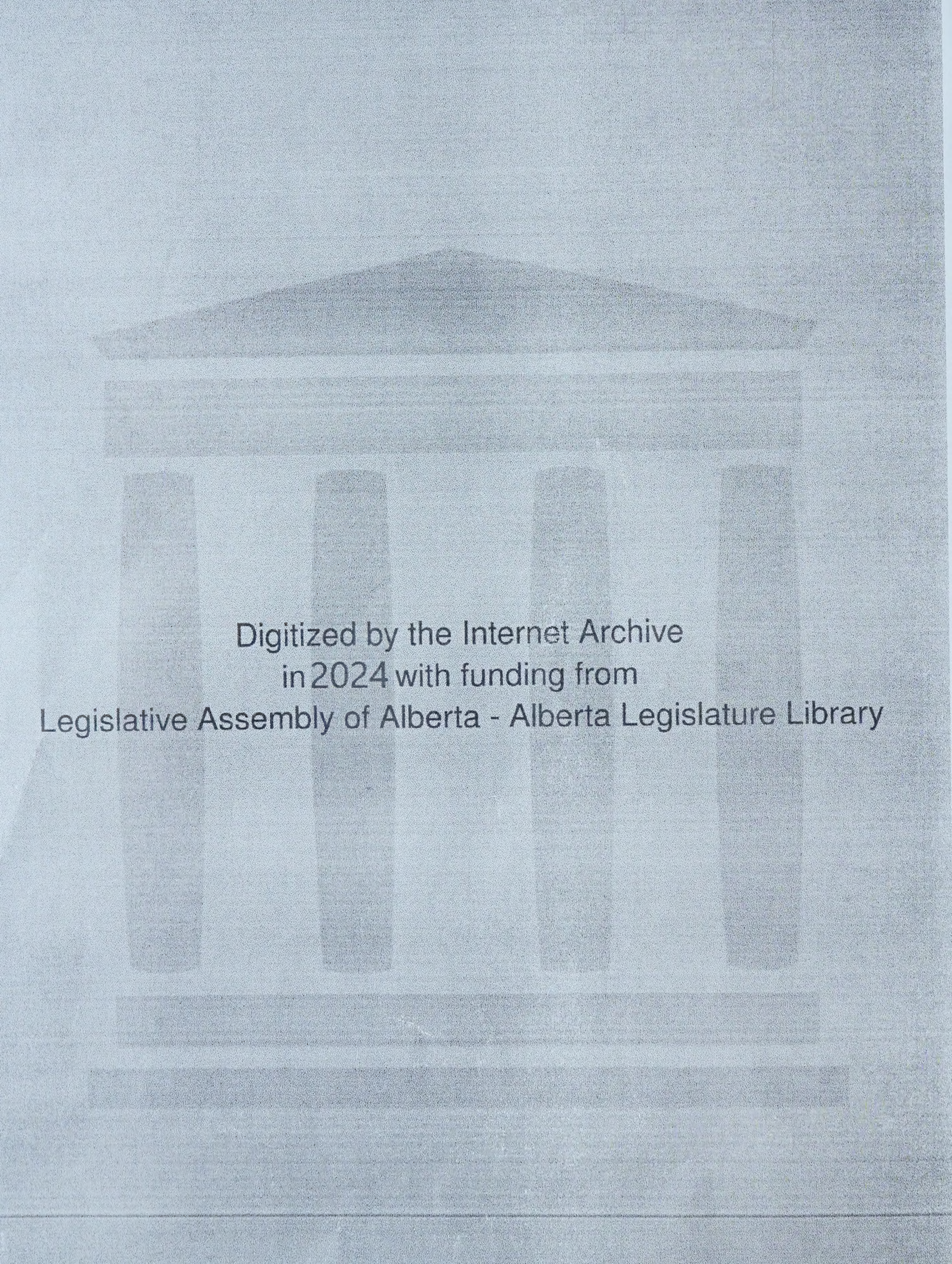


J. A. Riffel



Alberta  
Human Resources Research Council





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This paper is one of the products of an exploratory study on social reporting in Alberta. This exploratory study consisted of the holding of three seminars in 1971 to discuss the state of the progress of social reporting in Alberta, facilitated by David J. Riffel, then professor of social sciences studies, the first 1971 was facilitated by David J. Riffel at the University of Lethbridge.

## SOCIAL REPORTING IN ALBERTA:

### PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

J.A. RIFFEL

February, 1972



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## FOREWORD

This paper is one of the products of an exploratory study on social reporting in Alberta. This exploratory study (growing out of the Symposium on Social Opportunity held at HRRC in April 1969 and the program of Socio-Economic Opportunity Studies initiated by Karol J. Krotki, then coordinator of Socio-Economic Studies, in March 1970) was initiated in October 1970 at the instigation of L.W. Downey.

The purpose of the exploratory study was not to prepare a fullfledged, sophisticated social report, but to begin the task and assess its difficulty. Accordingly, the objectives of the study were to (1) develop a preliminary, heuristic framework for social reporting, (2) compile an inventory of relevant available data, (3) prepare status studies in each of the major dimension of the social report, and (4) assess the problems and prospects of social reporting in Alberta.

This paper describes what was learned about social reporting as a result of the exploratory study. In particular, the paper describes the conceptual history of the exploratory study, indicates some lessons learned and reinforced about social reporting, and outlines a framework and a general posture for future work.

Companion volumes to this paper which present some of the substantive findings of our exploratory study include several HRRC Research Reports and Alberta, 1971: Toward a Social Audit by L.W. Downey.

How does one take stock of an exploratory study of social



reporting?

The key to an answer to this question is an appreciation of the significance of the phrase "exploratory study". The primary value of an exploratory study is not to be found in tested hypotheses or in firm answers to questions; rather, its purpose is to suggest hypotheses which might be tested and questions which might be answered at a later date. In the absence of a tested theory of social reporting, the best that can be done is to identify and ask the right questions. I hope that the questions and hypotheses about social reporting contained in this document are the right ones -- that tests of the hypotheses, and answers to the questions will point ways to useful models for social reporting and at the same time indicate, and perhaps even resolve, some of the long-standing problems which have confronted all who have tried to produce even a modest social report.

This report is a collection and extension of some of the ideas about social reporting developed during HRRC's exploratory study. Many of my colleagues have made an invaluable contribution to the ideas presented here. I should especially like to acknowledge the help of L.W. Downey, S. McDaniel, L. Taylor, and M.E. Manley-Casimir. Any errors and omissions are my responsibility, however, and the views and conclusions expressed in this report should not be construed as expressing the opinion of the Alberta Human Resources Research Council.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
FOREWORD	i
CHAPTER ONE	
A NOTE ON SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL POLICY	
CENTRAL ASSUMPTIONS	2
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL POLICY	3
SOCIAL REPORTING: WHY AND WHAT?	8
CONCLUDING NOTE	13
NOTES	14
CHAPTER TWO	
THE UNCERTAIN ART OF SOCIAL REPORTING: THE HRRC EXPERIENCE IN RETROSPECT	
SOCIAL REPORTING: THE HRRC EXPERIENCE	16
The Birth of a Notion	17
Courtship	19
Reality !	23
Postscript	28
THE UNCERTAIN ART OF SOCIAL REPORTING: SOME LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY	28
Fundamental Problems of Social Reporting	29
Social research and social policy	29
On building a framework	32
Social goals and social reporting	33
Social change and out-of-date concepts	34
The social statistics gap	35



The problem of valid social measurement and analysis	37
Some Practical Problems	38
Concluding Note	41
SUMMARY	41
NOTES	43
CHAPTER THREE	
A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL REPORTING	44
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	45
Sectors in the Framework	48
Social goals	50
Individual needs	51
Social services	52
Levels in the Framework: The Goals and Needs Sectors	
The Components of the Services Sector	58
Choosing Indicators	61
Assessing Attainment	61
The Problem of Consensus	63
Summary Comments	65
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SOME CAVEATS	66
CONCLUDING NOTE	67
NOTES	68
CHAPTER FOUR	
THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL REPORTING: THE PRACTICAL	
A NOTE ON PRESENT PROBLEMS AND FUTURE REQUIREMENTS	70
CONCLUSION	73
NOTES	75



## CHAPTER ONE

### A NOTE ON SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL POLICY

Can social policy be created rationally? Can the findings of social science be used to inform policy making?

This paper offers a cautiously affirmative answer to these questions by focussing on an approach to policy-informing social research which has been given the convenient, although somewhat misleading, label "social reporting".

What is social reporting? What can a social report do? How is a social report to be viewed? How is framework to be developed? How can the framework be applied to the analysis of social conditions? What can be learned from exploratory studies? What, specifically, are some possible next steps?

This paper addresses these questions and others as well. Its basis is an exploratory study which was recently completed by the Alberta Human Resources Research Council. The specific aims of this paper are threefold: first, to recount the conceptual history and some of the lessons of the exploratory study; second, to describe a proposed framework for social reporting which has grown out of the exploratory study; and third, to outline a general approach to further work on social reporting.

However, discussion of these three central concerns must be preceded by an examination of some important background considerations -- first, some central assumptions and second, the relationships between social research and social policy which provide the larger frame of social reporting. These background considerations, together

with a tentative definition of social reporting, are the subject of this Chapter.

### CENTRAL ASSUMPTIONS

Social reporting is based on at least three central assumptions. All of these assumptions are, at least in some quarters, controversial and the reader is of course free to accept or reject them.

First, social reporting should concern itself directly with the analysis and resolution of contemporary social problems. Thus, social research must lead to those basic understandings of the operation of the social system and of the behavior of individuals which will provide a solid base of knowledge for planning, or replanning, the future. The social scientist's role is that of social actuary, informing public policy without claiming any further expertise.

Second, the high standards set for public policy making by the desire for rationality and comprehensiveness can be approached, if not realized, by enlarging the applicability of objective analysis of policy making.

And third, there is a need for analyses of social problems which deal, directly or indirectly *but simultaneously and explicitly*, with (a) social goals and values, (b) the needs and aspirations of individuals within society, and (c) alternatives for social action. Too often in the past (anti-poverty and manpower retraining programs come to mind here) analyses which have overlooked one or more of these dimensions have led to ineffective social programs.



## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL POLICY

Since the larger dimension of social reporting has to do with the relationship between social research and social policy, a discussion of the latter relationship, however brief, should precede an examination of social reporting.

Two preliminary definitions, one of social policy and the other of social policy research, should be helpful in establishing a frame of reference for our brief treatment. According to Freeman and Sherwood, *social policy*

. . . is a lay term, not a technical one, and like most such terms, it defies simple definition. . . At least four different uses or definitions can be distinguished, however:

1. Social policy as a philosophical concept. In an abstract sense, social policy is the principle whereby the members of large organizations and political entities collectively seek enduring solutions to the problems that affect them -- almost the opposite, that is, of rugged individualism.
2. Social policy as a product. Viewed as a product, social policy consists of the conclusions reached by persons concerned with the betterment of community conditions and social life, and with the amelioration of deviance and social disorganization. Often the product is a document -- what the British call a "white paper" -- which lays out the intended policy for an organization or political unit.
3. Social policy as a process. Here, social policy is the fundamental process by which enduring organizations maintain an element of stability and at the same time seek to improve conditions for their members. Existing social policies are usually never fully developed; they are continually modified in the face of changing conditions and values.
4. Social policy as a framework for action. As a framework for action, social policy is both product and process. It assumes the availability of a well-delineated policy which is to be implemented within the context of potential changes in the values, structure, and conditions of the group affected.<sup>1</sup>

The same authors offer this preliminary definition of *social-policy research*:

*Social-policy research refers to the use of the methods and findings of social research in the development and carrying out of communal efforts to improve the social and physical environments of the members of the community and to better their psychological and physical lives.*

*Social-policy research generally is no different from other types of social and psychological investigations, either in terms of the empirical perspective of the researcher or the research principles and techniques which guide him. It is in the selection of the problems and the goals of the research that social-policy research is distinguished from so-called "pure" research. The social-policy researcher sees himself within a context of social problems, social action, and social change. The way he selects and formulates his research problems, as well as his aspirations for the utilization of his work, are influenced accordingly. Thus, social-policy research can be thought of as the application of general social-research methods, under a particular set of circumstances and toward certain specified ends, by individuals with training in the social sciences and an orientation toward the solution of social problems.<sup>2</sup>*

From these preliminary definitions it should be apparent that here we are dealing with an exceedingly complex matter which includes not only the products of the efforts of policy makers and social scientists but the way in which they work, the assumptions on which they base their activities, and so on. Unfortunately the matter is made even more complex because our understandings of policy making are vague at best. How, then, are we to deal with the interplay between social research and social policy and perhaps even to think about improving it?

One place to begin is with a tentative identification of the tasks of policy-making and social science and with the requirements of each. From such a beginning it should be possible to move



toward the point of identifying overlaps between their respective needs and contributions and, eventually, to speculate about strengthening the bonds between the two.

The discussion which is to follow presents, in simplified and exceedingly condensed form, an approach to the analysis of the interplay between social policy and social research. Extended treatments of this matter can be found in Freeman and Sherwood<sup>3</sup>, Dror<sup>4</sup>, Kahn<sup>5</sup>, and Barber<sup>6</sup>.

Policy making involves several analytically distinct activities; although a logical sequence for these activities can be suggested, practice seldom conforms to such a sequence. The basic activities in social policy making usually includes the following:

1. instigation of policy-making activities through demands for action;
2. identification of social values and goals and the needs, aspirations, and values of individuals;
3. description and analysis of present conditions;
4. assessment of the extent to which present conditions are different from the desired state of affairs;
5. formulation of general policies, plans or programs to achieve congruence between existing conditions and the desired state of affairs;
6. translation of general policies, plans, or programs into action models and specific activities, including identification of the target population(s);
7. implementation;
8. evaluation of how the program is conducted; and

## 9. evaluation of the program's impact.

Research can make a significant contribution at each of these stages of policy development. And at present it does -- but the contribution is most commonly fragmentary and serendipitous rather than comprehensive and planned. The contributions of research can be described best in terms of the three principal tasks of scientific inquiry -- description, explanation, and prediction.

Description is concerned with the identification of *facts*, with distinctions among variables and events, and with their measurement. Matters of definition, observation, and classification are basic to any description. Both static or momentary and dynamic or changing aspects of variables and events may be described.

Explanation is concerned with analyzing and understanding *relationships* among variables; it implies some sort of theory.

Prediction, whether based on theory or unexplained relationships among variables, is concerned with indicating in advance what *future* events, conditions, patterns, and behavior might be. While predictions in social science have not, to date, always been successful, the accumulation of knowledge and the development of techniques suggest that, in the future, the predictive power of the social sciences may be increased.

The ways in which the three research tasks relate to the various phases of policy development can be shown by a cross-classification table. Table 1.1, which is self-explanatory and so presented without comment, illustrates the possibilities.



Table 1.1  
Research and Policy Making<sup>7</sup>

Elements of Policy Making	Functions of Research		
	Description	Explanation	Prediction
1. Instigation of policy making			
2. Identifying goal	x		
3. Present conditions	x	x	
4. Assessing discrepancies	x		
5. Formulation of general policies to alleviate discrepancies		x	x
6. Formulation of action programs		x	x
7. Identifying target population	x		
8. Implementation			
9. Evaluation of conduct of program	x		
10. Evaluation of program's impact		x	

At this point, the question may legitimately be raised as to whether the approach suggested in Table 1.1 is realistic or an unattainable ideal given political and bureaucratic realities. From one point of view the history of Canadian social policy shows little which can be attributed to social research and suggests that social science is not ready to assume a role of such significance. Another point of view is more optimistic -- a few successful experiments (the most notable of which is Lithwick's study of the problems and prospects of urban Canada<sup>8</sup>) indicate that the time may be ripe, as Senator Lamontagne says, to negotiate a new deal between policy makers and social scientists.<sup>9</sup>

So much for the moment about the relationship between social research and the creation of social policy. The outlines sketched above will provide the starting point for much of the analysis and model-building in the balance of this report. From this preliminary framework the idea of social reporting can be considered in greater detail.

### SOCIAL REPORTING: WHY AND WHAT?

*Knowledge, action, and evaluation are essentially connected. The primary and pervasive significance of knowledge lies in its guidance of action: knowing is for the sake of doing. And action, obviously, is rooted in evaluation. For a being which did not assign comparative values, deliberate action would be pointless; and for one which did not know, it would be impossible.*

The description, explanation, and assessment of present conditions are fundamental to making informed decisions about social policy. There can be little doubt that all three are central to understanding the operation of a social system and to the guidance of social change.

In spite of their crucial importance to policy making, these components of policy-informing research are poorly developed in two important features.

First, the data are generally inadequate. Only a small proportion of available statistics tell policy makers anything about important social conditions or about the magnitude and direction of change. Only a few are useful for charting the directions of change, for taking periodic readings of social movement, and for plotting course corrections. So, for example, policy makers usually have more



or less up-to-date information on such basic demographic processes as births, deaths, and net migration to regions, and on the performance of the economy. However, they do not have adequate information on crucial social processes such as discrimination, urbanization, social mobility.

The second feature in which these components are poorly developed is perhaps even more important than the first. The explanations and models -- which tell us the significance of variables, events, trends, and the relationships among them, and which simplify, clarify, and make order out of complex social phenomena of social science often seem inadequate in relation to the needs of informed policy making. Often, we do not know which variables are important, how to analyze relationships among variables, how to interpret them, and so on.

In this context, then, and assuming that "good" policy making requires "good" information (information that is valid, readily accessible, timely, reliable, and relevant), the problem of improving policy making is fundamentally tied to enhancing the policy maker's knowledge and information about the social system as well as his appreciation of individual and social goals and values.

This problem cannot be solved simply by making policy makers more voracious consumers of available information or by collecting more information of the same kind. The policy maker probably already has too much information and too many statistics which are not useful. Instead, new ideas about improving the usefulness of our vast store of information and the instruments for generating it are required.

Some of the most promising recent thinking about social information systems centers around the development of social reporting which would include devising a number of indicators of social progress or retrogression. In a recent publication, *Toward a Social Report*, the U.S. office of Health, Education and Welfare described a social indicator as

*. . . a statistic of direct normative interest which facilitates concise, comprehensive and balanced judgements about the condition of major aspects of a society. It is in all cases a direct measure of welfare and is subject to the interpretation that, if it changes in the "right" direction, while other things remain equal, things have gotten better, or people are "better off".*

In *Toward a Social Report* the case for gathering or compiling a set of social indicators (a social report) was put in this way:

*A social report with a set of social indicators could not only satisfy our curiosity about how well we are doing, but it could also improve public policy making in at least two ways. First, it could give social problems more visibility and thus make possible more informed judgements about national priorities. Second, by providing insight into how different measures of national well-being are changing, it might ultimately make possible a better evaluation of what public programs are accomplishing.<sup>12</sup>*

This is not to suggest that, with the effective incorporation of quantitative indices into the process, policy making will become a simple matter of summing it all up. Rather, it emphasizes the need to understand better social trends and the quality of programs so that policy needs can be determined, public programs can be evaluated, and the effects of legislation can be tested.

Social indicators are different from other forms of quant-



itative social information, namely social statistics and socio-demographic models of social systems.

Social statistics are largely descriptive: they are relevant to the question "*What* is being done?" Included in this category are most social data now available: data on the number of doctors, of first admissions to mental hospitals, and on bed capacities are examples drawn from the health field. The number of other examples which could be cited is almost endless.

Social indicators *add* two normative elements: "What should we be doing?" "How well are we doing it?" In other words, they involve the specification of both goals and standards of performance. Included in this category could be crime *rates*, literacy *rates*, and the like which are presented in comparison to some standard. Such standards may be absolute: for example, an illiteracy rate of more than  $x$  is intolerable. They may be relative to another system: for example, in Canada, Ontario is commonly regarded as the standard of economic development for other provinces. And they may be relative to the system itself at an earlier point in time: for example, in the area of crime, the lower rates of ten years ago may serve as a standard for the present time, all other things being equal.

Socio-demographic models *add* an element of theory: "Can we represent what we are doing in terms of a useful model of social and demographic processes?" A model is a set of statements about some aspect of reality, past, present or predicted. It describes the components of that reality and, by specifying the nature of the relationships among these components, seeks to represent reality.

Many such models are now in common use to inform policy making, including: models for population projection; operations research models of business processes; and so on.

Thus, social indicators should incorporate all three elements *explicitly* -- description, theory, and norms or values. Meaningful social indicators should be grounded in the best available theoretical work and should be useful for describing and assessing movement toward or away from important social goals. They would have power because they would have a known relationship to social goals and because the kinds of interpretations and conclusions that could be drawn from them would be known beforehand -- they would be both products of existing knowledge and extensions of it.

As stated previously, and as will be emphasized again in this paper, social reporting represents an attempt to use social science for the purpose of informing social policy. In its design and procedures for collecting and analyzing information it must attempt to adhere as closely as possible to the canons of the scientific method. By adopting this method, the *hope* is that information on which policy is based will be more objective and of ascertainable validity and reliability.

At the same time, social reporting is applied research and its "success" will depend upon its usefulness to the policy maker. Thus, while scientific criteria will determine the degree of confidence that may be placed in a social report, political and administrative criteria will play a larger role in determining the usefulness of a social report.



### CONCLUDING NOTE

This Chapter has attempted to set the stage for the discussion of HRRC's exploratory study of social reporting in Alberta by making explicit the central assumptions of social reporting, by placing social reporting in the larger context of the interplay between social research and social policy making, and by venturing a tentative definition of social reporting.

This paper has three chapters following this introduction. Chapter Two gives a conceptual history of the HRRC experience and with some lessons about social reporting learned and reinforced during the course of the exploratory study. Chapter Three describes a proposed framework for social reporting. Finally, Chapter Four discusses the need for the "practical" as a way to improve social reporting.

This work is clearly only a beginning. A great deal of work remains to be done. On the one hand, this paper describes a preliminary exercise on social reporting. On the other, it raises many more questions than it answers. It is hoped that, through these two emphases, readers will discover in the report clues to the improvement of both social reporting and social policy making.

# NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>H.E. Freeman and C.C. Sherwood. *Social Research and Social Policy*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup>Y. Dror. *Public Policy Making Re-Examined*. San Francisco: Chandler, 1968.
- <sup>5</sup>A.H. Kahn. *Theory and Practice of Social Planning*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1969.
- <sup>6</sup>B. Barber. *Science and the Social Order*. New York: Collier, 1962.
- <sup>7</sup>Adapted from Freeman and Sherwood, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
- <sup>8</sup>*Urban Canada: Problems and Prospects*. A report prepared by N.H. Lithwick for the Honorable R.K. Andras, Minister Responsible for Housing, Government of Canada. Ottawa, 1970.
- <sup>9</sup>M. Lamontagne. *The Proceedings of the Senate Committee on Science Policy*. First Session, 28th Parliament. 29 March, 1969. 4837.
- <sup>10</sup>C.L. Lewis. *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation, The Paul Carus Lectures VII*. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing, 1946, p. 3.
- <sup>11</sup>U.S. Office of Health, Education and Welfare, *Toward a Social Report*. Washington, D.C., 1969, p. 97.
- <sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE UNCERTAIN ART OF SOCIAL REPORTING: THE HRRC EXPERIENCE IN RETROSPECT

In 1970-71, the Human Resources Research Council undertook the first of what was intended to be a series of studies of social reporting in Alberta. The general purpose of the first study was exploratory -- to begin the task and assess its difficulty. Accordingly, the objectives of the study were to: (1) develop a preliminary, heuristic framework for social reporting; (2) compile an inventory of relevant available data; (3) prepare status studies in selected aspects of life in Alberta; and (4) assess the problems and prospects of social reporting in Alberta.

Then and now, that first exploratory study meant different things for the different people involved. For some, it was an exploratory study designed to formulate a framework for social reporting which could be tested at a later date. Others saw it as an opportunity to study and report on the quality of selected aspects of life in Alberta. Still others were most interested in the analysis of public policy.

Doubtless, the "story" of HRRC's first venture into social reporting should be told from all of these vantage points, for the interpretation of the venture would vary in each case. But in this narrative the point of departure will be the first -- an exploratory study designed to formulate a framework to guide later work, where the operative work is exploratory.

"Exploratory" is a good word, but if used without elaboration it can also be a rather bloodless term, hiding many real pitfalls in social reporting. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the evolution of the framework, some of the difficulties which were encountered, and some lessons of the HRRC experience.

This chapter has two main sections. The first describes the evolution of the framework for social reporting which grew out of HRRC's work (the "final" form of this framework, which is the product of that evolution, is described in the following chapter). The narrative is not a complete "social history" of the first venture, but rather an outline of the changes which occurred in our thinking about social reporting. While such a complete social history would be useful, it would divert attention from social reporting per se in addressing a wide variety of personal, interpersonal, organizational, and environmental matters.

The second section is concerned with some lessons about social reporting learned and reinforced during the exploratory study. It is an analysis of some of the difficulties encountered, set apart from the first section so as not to distort the story of the exploratory venture.

#### SOCIAL REPORTING: THE HRRC EXPERIENCE

The mandate of the Human Resources Research Council states, in part:

. . .The objects of the Council are to undertake educational, social, economic and other research relating to and affecting the development and conservation of human resources in Alberta and, in particular. . .



- (a) . . .to gather, analyze, coordinate and distribute available knowledge. . .
- (b) to develop, revise and assess plans, materials and procedures relating to or affecting educational, social, economic and other aspects of human resources development, and to disseminate the results. . .<sup>1</sup>

The logic and purposes of social reporting seemed to be in keeping with that rather formidable mandate.

### The Birth of a Notion

The realization that social reporting might be a particularly suitable way to pursue HRRC's mandate did not come suddenly. It grew out of two sets of studies emphasizing the general theme of social opportunity.

The first set of studies was prepared for a "Social Opportunity Symposium" held early in 1969. A number of individuals and organizations were invited to prepare status reports or position papers for presentation at a symposium of academics and public officials. Twenty-nine reports and papers were presented. The diversity of these is illustrated by the following titles: "The Use of Human Resources Research", "Three Approaches to the Problem of Opportunity", "Some Areas of Needed Research in Education", "The Canadian Indian and the Urban Setting", "Toward Equality of Opportunity in the Law", "Inequalities in Mental Health", and "Dentistry in Alberta".

The second set of studies was propped as an in-house program of research in the area of "Socio-Economic Opportunity". A large number of studies was proposed and a much smaller number, about fifteen, was conducted. A list of studies from this set

would show similar diversity and one other feature -- a general emphasis upon the identification of available social statistics.

When these two sets of studies and their implications were examined, a number of points became clear. On the negative side, five factors generated doubts about the usefulness of the two sets of studies in pursuing the mandate. The first factor has been a common one in social science -- the uneven quality of the various studies. The second factor was not unusual either -- lack of agreement as to how to proceed, what to study, what methods to use, and so on. Third, it became clear that the two sets of studies overlooked, for no apparent reason, some important dimensions of individual and social life -- for example, the family, religious experience, and recreation and the arts. Fourth, most of these initial studies (particularly those in the first set) focussed at least implicitly on inequality of opportunity and on underprivileged groups in the population. This came to be regarded as inappropriate inasmuch as the development of human resources should be directed in the first instance towards raising the overall level and widening the horizons of the whole population. Finally, these initial studies lacked a useable and systematic focus, so much so that the products tended to be a collection of "stuff" without order and discipline.

On the positive side, these same studies revealed a considerable amount of potentially useful social statistics and insights. It appeared that much might be gained by integrating these statistics and insights and giving them a focus. And it seemed that the notion of social reporting might be a promising way to accomplish this.

Hence, HRRC's exploratory study of social reporting.

### Courtship

Identifying the shortcomings of some of HRRC's early work was one thing; developing the idea of social reporting as an alternative was quite another.

The exploratory study was launched in the fall of 1970 under the direction of a multi-disciplinary task force made up of four persons -- an educator, a demographer, an architect-cum-city planner, and a journalist. Over the ten-month life of the study, this task force worked closely with about twenty-five other persons. The twenty-five were drawn from most of the social sciences -- including psychology, anthropology, economics, political science and education. Most, though not all, were academics.

The first stage of the work was a period of intellectual courtship in which exciting ideas and prospects were discussed. It was a period of heady activity and a generous measure of muddling through.

The work began with an examination of the literature on social reporting. To make a long story short, some important things were found to be wrong with social reporting -- for example, too much emphasis placed on trivial matters and not enough on crucial facts, too much of the commonplace, far too much jargon without definition, and too little description of experience and lessons of the past. But the idea of social reporting continued to be compelling and a start seemed necessary.

The period of courtship continued, and grew more intense,



with the development of a framework for social reporting in Alberta. The evolution of this framework is the major focus of the balance of this section.

The initial framework took the following form:

- A. THE HUMAN RESOURCES AUDIT: Indicators of the Quality of Life
  - 1. The Affluent and the Poor
  - 2. The Adjusted and the Deviant
  - 3. The Educated and the Uneducated
  - 4. The Sick and the Well
  - 5. The Criminal and the Delinquent
  - 6. The Gifted
  - 7. The "Haves and "Have Nots" -- A Summary of Correlations
- B. AUDIT OF THE SOCIAL DELIVERY SYSTEM: Indicators of Opportunity
  - 1. Sources of Employment and Income Security
  - 2. Care for the Mentally Ill and Addicted
  - 3. Educational Opportunities
  - 4. Health Care Services
  - 5. Custodial and Rehabilitation Services for the Delinquent
  - 6. Opportunities for the Gifted
  - 7. The Social Services Delivery System
- C. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

This outline had many gaps and at least implicitly focussed on the "have nots", and so was abandoned. But it had one feature which would be returned to later -- the separation of information about classes of people from information about the social services.

The second outline had three main features in relation to the first: it was expanded, largely in an intuitive manner; many of the materials were reorganized; and concerns for classes of people were merged with concerns for the delivery of services. With regard to this last point, it was felt at the time that such a merging would be more useful in indicating the adequacy or inadequacy of social services. The principal sections in the second outline, with examples

of specific interests, were:

A. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

1. The Sick and the Well
2. The Disabled
3. The Deviant

B. SOCIAL MOBILITY

1. The Educated and the Uneducated
2. Men and Women
3. Immigrants and Residents

C. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Housing
2. Population Concentrations

D. EMPLOYMENT, INCOME AND POVERTY

1. The Poor and the Affluent
2. The Unemployed and the Employed

E. LEGAL JUSTICE

1. The Criminal and the Delinquent
2. The Charged

F. PERSONAL FREEDOMS

1. The Harrassed and Unbothered
2. The Suppressed and Outspoken

G. SCIENCE AND CULTURE

1. Research and Development
2. Science and Technology

H. PARTICIPATION AND ALIENATION

1. The Enfranchised and the Disenfranchised
2. The Involved and the Uninvolved

I. REAL GOALS AND THE FUTURE

However, on closer examination the second outline proved to have many of the same defects as the first (for some, this is the true meaning of "muddling through"). As a result, a new strategy was

adopted. Ten principal areas were selected: physical and mental well-being; education; physical environment; employment, income, poverty, and ownership; legal justice; personal freedoms; science and culture; participation and alienation; family life; and religious experience. Then a list of variables and data sources was prepared, working from such documents as the Outline of Cultural Materials<sup>2</sup>.

The deficiencies of these documents were well known at the time; however, they were intended to provoke thinking in real terms about the problem of social reporting. And they did.

From this effort emerged a working outline for the data gathering stage of the venture. The working outline was very long and so cannot be reproduced fully here. The outline for the education section will serve to illustrate the general form which these took:

#### A. PREVALENT BELIEFS ABOUT EDUCATION

1. Education for What Purposes?
2. Why is Educational Opportunity Important?
3. Who Should Have These Opportunities?

#### B. THE LEARNING FORCE

1. Enrolments in "Regular" Institutions
2. Enrolments Outside the Formal Structure
3. Learners with Special Characteristics
4. Dropouts

#### C. EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

1. Institutions of all Kinds
2. Teachers and Their Characteristics
3. Programs
4. Regulations Affecting Opportunity
5. The Cost of Assistance to Students
6. Financial Assistance to Students

#### D. WHAT HAVE ALBERTANS LEARNED?

1. Participation Rates



2. Retention Rates
3. Illiteracy and Incompetence in Elementary Arithmetic
4. Attainment by Age Groups
5. Schooling of the Labor Force

E. SOME POLICY ISSUES: WHAT DO WE NEED TO LEARN?

F. SOME POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The period of courtship ended with the development of outlines such as these. The task force then turned to the real world.

### Reality!

December of 1970, about two months after the venture had been launched, marked the beginning of a seven month period of hectic activity.

The working outline was shared with a number of people in and outside of HRRC. Reactions to the outline were mixed, but never neutral -- there seemed to be equal amounts of support and opposition, of cautious optimism and restrained pessimism. There was near agreement that such a study should be done, but less agreement that it could be done.

In-house staff were contacted to prepare some status reports; academics and others were commissioned to produce others. In all, twelve were undertaken: employment and income in Alberta; a review of educational opportunity; the family in Alberta; religion and culture in Alberta; participation and alienation; personal freedoms; a review of poverty in Alberta; physical and mental well-being of Albertans; legal justice in Alberta; recreation and the arts; science and technology; and man's environment. The tasks accepted by the investigators in each area were formidable -- to assemble the best

available data in each area and to prepare a report according to the outline developed by the task force.

The assistance of a number of agencies, including Statistics Canada and the Alberta Bureau of Statistics, was obtained. The different principal investigators made use of this assistance to varying degrees, depending upon their personal inclinations, their area of investigation, and other factors.

Reports were received from the principal investigators over a four month period, the first in late January, and the last in mid-April. The reports were reviewed by the task force and then by external reviewers recommended by the principal investigators. In general, this review process showed that: (1) the materials had considerable promise in the ideas and data they contained but posed great problems in the ways in which they were presented; (2) the materials were "softer" and more speculative than had been hoped; (3) the materials blended to the point of confusion information about the conditions of people with judgments about the delivery systems; and (4) that the areas being examined were not all in the same conceptual domain ("science and technology" was of a clearly different order than "health").

Thus, it seemed that further revision of the conceptual framework were required, if only to serve as a better guide in the preparation of the task force's overall report. The two alternatives which emerged are illustrated in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. Both were based on the judgements that: (1) it was necessary to separate information about the conditions of people from that about delivery

I. HUMAN NEEDS	II. INDICATORS				III. THE DELIVERY SYSTEM				IV. POLICY QUESTIONS
	A. NORMS	B. SAMPLE	C. DATA	D. DISCUSSION	A. SCOPE	B. FOCUS	C. ADEQUACY	D. DISCUSSION	
Health	1. Legal Norms? Where? What? 2. Commonly Accepted Norms? 3. Need for Norms?	1. How are subjects identified -- by the delivery system or otherwise? 2. How adequate?	1. What data exist? What do not? 2. The data.	1. Implications of data. 2. Adequacy of data. 3. Other.	1. Public-non-public? 2. Active-passive? 3. Voluntary-non-voluntary?	1. Developmental? Preventive? 2. Remedial? Custodial? 3. Rehabilitative? Compensatory?	1. Adequacy of scope. 2. Data re. effectiveness. 3. Info. re. planning.	1. Implications of information. 2. Adequacy of information.	
Income									
Education									
Justice									
Freedom									
Association									
Participation									
Physical Environment									

#### Self-Renewing Mechanisms in Society

Science  
Technology  
Planning

(This is a different order of category. It assesses the )  
(investments and strategies of the society for renewing )  
(and improving itself.)

FIGURE 2.1



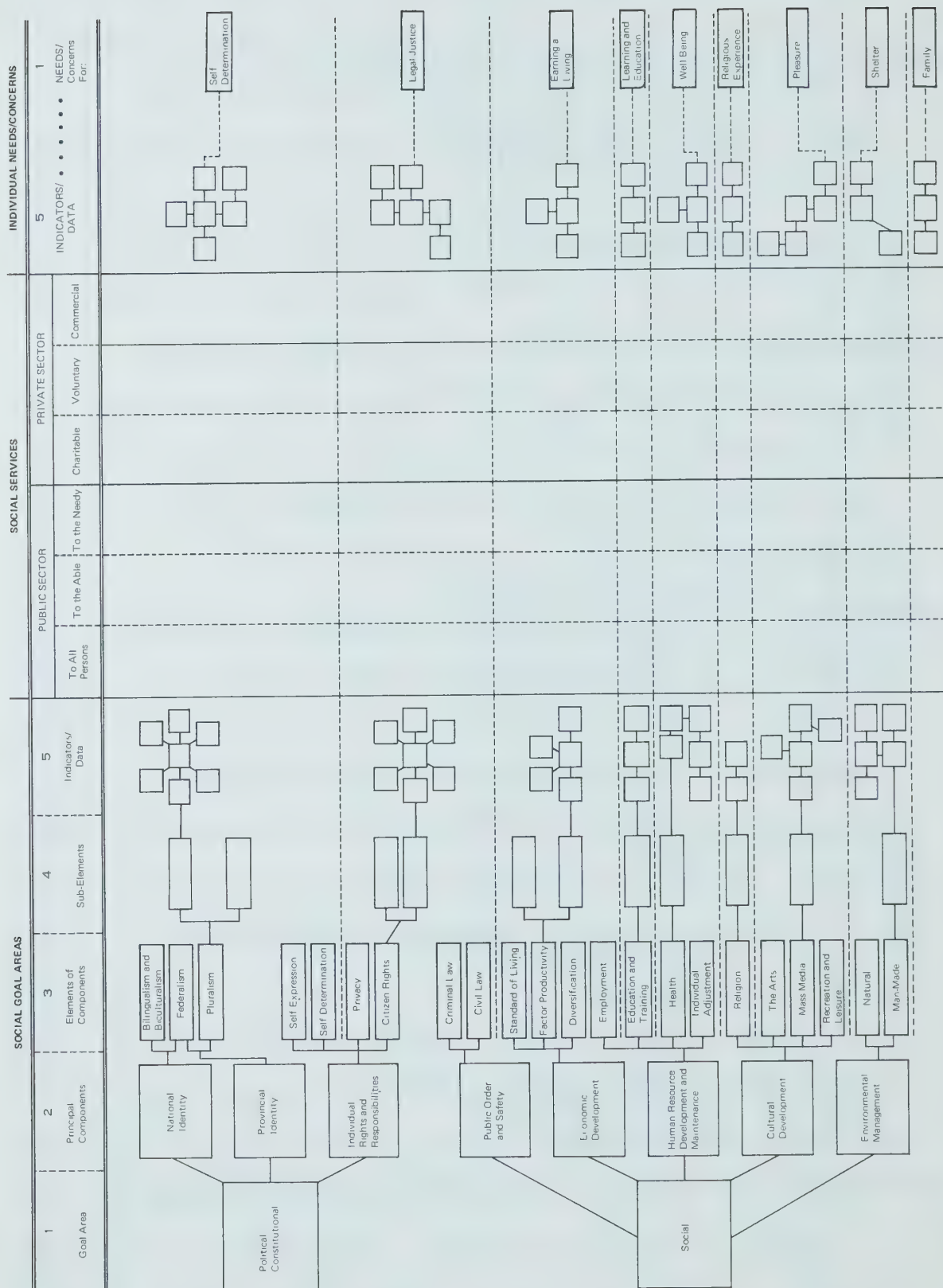


FIGURE 2.2

systems; (2) more explicit attention had to be paid to the questions of social goals and of real or assumed for social conditions; and (3) inasmuch as possible, the areas included in the framework should be in the same conceptual domain. The second alternative (Figure 2.2) was eventually selected.

Once the conceptual framework had been revised, a journalist was hired to reorganize and translate the materials for a non-academic audience. The journalist's work was reviewed by the task force and the principal investigator in each case, and revised. This was one of the most difficult aspects of the whole venture for much adjudication was needed in balancing the niceties of scientific communications with more general readability.

Finally, the task force presented its overall report in June, 1971.

Events and activities such as these were to reveal, in the end, that:

1. the work suffered from many of the same deficiencies as its precursors, although, perhaps, to a somewhat lesser degree -- uneven approaches and products, significant omissions, and lack of a useable focus. The reasons for this -- some personal, some organizational, and some conceptual -- are outlined in the next section of this chapter.

2. progress had been made in two important respects. One, an appreciable portion of the social statistics about Alberta had been drawn together in one place for the first time. And two, a particular approach to gathering and organizing social statistics had been tested;

although it was found wanting it nevertheless pointed the way to further improvements.

### Postscript

The task force completed its work in June of 1971 after ten months of hectic activity.

A number of the status reports have since been published: Employment and Income in Alberta, 1970<sup>3</sup>; A Review of Educational Opportunity, Alberta, 1970<sup>4</sup>; The Family in Alberta<sup>5</sup> (reprinted); and A Review of Poverty in Alberta<sup>6</sup>. A larger study on which one of the status reports was based was also published -- Socio-Legal Statistics In Alberta<sup>7</sup>.

A comprehensive, yet brief and highly selective "report to the people of Alberta about the quality of life in Alberta" has been published -- Alberta, 1971: Toward a Social Audit<sup>8</sup>.

And the work of developing the conceptual framework further has continued. The next chapter of this report describes this framework as it has developed to date. The framework outlined there is an outgrowth of the events and encounters of the exploratory study just reviewed.

### THE UNCERTAIN ART OF SOCIAL REPORTING:

#### SOME LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY

In general, the logic of social reporting is convincing and its purposes can be readily endorsed by many persons. But there are as yet no examples anywhere of a social report. The reason for this is straightforward -- there are a great many problems to be understood and resolved before the larger objectives of social reporting



can be realized. The exploratory study has helped to bring many of these problems into clearer focus.

Two categories of problems are outlined here; they might be labelled loosely as "fundamental" and "practical". The first category includes problems inherent in social reporting, indeed in most social research. The second includes problems of a more mechanical, less fundamental nature which are encountered in an actual attempt to prepare a social report. Describing one category of problems as fundamental and the other as practical is not to suggest that the latter is less troublesome: on occasion quite the opposite can be the case.

#### Fundamental Problems of Social Reporting

Social research and social policy. In one of its larger dimensions a central concern of social reporting is the connection between social research and social policy. Pleas for policy research, for developing a reliable empirical basis for generalizations and recommendations about policy making, have been made many times. Yet in spite of the frequency of these appeals, the connections between social science and the practice of social policy making have remained very weak.

There are, obviously, no easy solutions to the problem of strengthening of this relationship, and there is no ready formula for specifying exactly how this might be done. But, although the task of linking the study and practice of social policy has hardly begun, the contours of improvement can be marked by focusing on (1) the development of policy research, and (2) ways and means of removing

obstacles to a firmer link between research and policy making.

1. *Eliminating the obstacles.* In the past, speculations of social philosophers and the findings of social scientists have found their way into the functioning of government only very slowly. Now, the increasing power of the social sciences and growing recognition of the complexity of social problems have lent more credence to appeals for a more productive union of the two.

How, then, might the contribution of social science to policy making be augmented? There are several conditions:

(a) social policy research should reflect political needs, political realities, and the general goals of policy makers. As such, policy research should be timely, action-oriented, and directed at improving public policy. It should be concerned with critically examining expressed needs for public programs, with identifying social concerns in need of attention, and with providing knowledge about how goals might be achieved.

(b) the value premises underlying policy research should be made explicit, communicable, and, to the extent possible, arrived at jointly by scholars and policy makers. Questions like "What problems should be examined?" "What are suitable indicators?" "How are the results to be interpreted?" and so on can be answered only in part by looking to the routines of scientific inquiry. A full answer to any of them requires an appreciation of the normative bases of both social research and politics. A productive answer depends on the recognition and, where possible, a reconciliation of the differences between them.

(c) policy research should focus on pragmatic as well as "ideal" solutions to social problems. "Ideal" solutions to human problems can usually be conceived, but they can be implemented only very infrequently, if ever -- generally, they require excessive commitments of human and financial resources and they are to distance in time. Solutions based on expediency often suffer from defects that are just the opposite -- insufficient commitment of resources and programs that are tied too closely to present conditions. In Dror's phrase, the solutions should be "realistically idealistic"<sup>9</sup>, neither distant utopias nor conditions that will develop in any case, but situations that can be approached if the policy makers are willing to make a serious effort to do so.

2. *The development of policy research.* To date the study of public policy has taken two forms -- one the subjective impressions of social philosophers and experienced politicians, and the other the more empirical investigations of scientists from particular disciplines. The shortcomings of each of them, the sometimes excessive subjectivity of the former and the fragmented view of society that results from the latter, suggest the need for a policy science with the following characteristics:

(a) The central orientation of policy science should be with the problems faced by policy makers and with improving the policy making process. At the present time, certain branches of economics come closest to achieving this, and, it is worth noting, do so without threat to the place of pure research and theory within the discipline.



(b) The need to obtain as holistic as possible a view of the policy making process in the public sector rules out the possibility of tying policy science to any one of the existing social sciences, for each of them brings a particular disciplinary perspective (and, therefore, a partial perspective) to bear on the policy making process. The development of a policy science depends on making the boundaries among the disciplines permeable, on overcoming the tendency to hide knowledge behind the jargon and routines of a particular discipline, and on creating a setting in which this exchange can take place and be reinforced. It must also avoid developing, and hiding behind, its own boundaries and jargon.

(c) The inadequacies of policy research conducted either within the government or within traditional university structures strongly suggest that if policy science is to develop satisfactorily it should be housed in an agency which may break down existing constraints, whether in an independent institute, or in a special multi-faculty unit within the university, or in some other organization.

On building a framework. In essence, a framework for social reporting is a way of looking at reality. It is built around propositions about variables, the relationships among them, and the processes which connect them. Ideally, these propositions should be explicitly testable -- for their usefulness, their relevance, and their validity.

At the same time, a framework is also a way of not looking at reality. For its construction is based on processes designed to make reality less complex -- abstraction, simplification, and substitution. Which elements of reality are to be included in the frame-

work and which are to be omitted? Which relationships? Which processes? How are they to be represented?

Three points about this large problem in relation to social reporting need to be considered.

First, in general, the simpler the framework the better, if only because it will be easier to communicate and easier and cheaper to use. This is a question of balance. For example, if the number of indicators is too large, costs will be high and analysis and interpretation difficult. If, on the other hand, the number is too small, concepts will not be adequately represented.

Second, decisions on answers to these questions cannot be made in a vacuum. The design of the framework must reflect the purposes of the social report and the state of available social knowledge and theories.

And third, the framework must be developed through an interdisciplinary effort rather than from the perspectives of a single discipline alone, whether economics, sociology, psychology or other. While the dynamics of interdisciplinary research are difficult and not well understood, it seems essential if compounding problems of abstraction, simplification, and substitution is to be avoided.

Social goals and social reporting. The process of developing the framework on which HRRC's work was based involved, among other things, the process of identifying social goals. At the time, of course, the dangers in this were apparent, for social goals are very sensitive issues and the subject of great debate and the social scientist has no special competence in this area. Thus a concern

was to remain as neutral as possible in making value judgements about the primacy of various goals and to make sure that the selection of goals covered the possibilities adequately.

Whether or not the approach reflected the proper or best coverage and organization of the goal areas remains to be seen. These are questions which must be carefully watched in any subsequent steps within this province toward a social report.

There is another issue here which needs examination. There is a danger that indicators, which are operational measures of social goals and individual needs or concerns, may be treated as surrogate goals and needs rather than simply measures. There are enough examples in economics (the pursuit of the GNP and of arbitrary unemployment rates) and education to illustrate that the dangers of this are real.

Social change and out-of-date concepts. At all times, man is limited by his current understanding of social events and of the relationships among social variables. At first glance, this statement seems to be a truism far too obvious to mention. But when this statement is thought of in relation to a social report it becomes more significant. In HRRC's work the following issues were shown in sharp relief:

1. social goals change;
2. the balance between public and private social services shifts over time;
3. as certain needs and concerns of individual are satisfied, their place can be taken by other needs and concerns;



4. much of the available data is too faithful to the concepts of the past, more concerned with simply body- and dollar- counts than with the effectiveness of services or with the multidimensional nature of problems.

Any system for social reporting must be structured in such a way that, even if it might not anticipate such changes in the future, it shall be flexible enough to adjust to them when they occur.

The social statistics gap. In the various working papers designed to assemble available data which were prepared as a part of the exploratory study two sentences appear repeatedly: "Available data are far from adequate" and "There are virtually no data available which are relevant to this topic". This problem is the result of many factors, not the least of which is the fact that many of the areas dealt with are often regarded as private or personal matters and hence are not recorded statistically. But this is an ethical issue which, though of great importance, cannot be resolved here.<sup>10</sup> Four other factors are of concern.

The first is the unsystematic nature of current data systems whether private or public, municipal, provincial or national. This short space permits the identification of only a few of the problems with available data and a few of the issues which must be resolved if information management is to be improved. Chief among these problems are:

1. much of the data available are limited to one or at best a small number of uses, and seem better suited to "housekeeping" than program evaluation and planning;

2. historical data are difficult to obtain in "raw" or unanalyzed form and so cannot be used for new analysis;
3. there is a great variety of seldom comparable reporting units -- census divisions, counties, hospital districts, and so on;
4. much of the data are very prone to error and therefore of questionable usefulness.

However, these rather technical problems and others like them may prove to be easier to resolve than certain other more normative issues surrounding the use of social indicators. These normative issues can be expressed best in terms of the following questions. Who should devise the model for a social report? Who should collect the data and how? How will conflicts in data and their interpretation be resolved? How will the social report be used? These are crucial questions which can be answered only tentatively and only in individual circumstances. The present state of the art of social reporting does not warrant unqualified and generalizable answers to questions of this order.

The second is that many of the important facts of social life -- like justice, neighborliness, and helpfulness -- are things that can be measured only very superficially and handled only inadequately by existing statistical methods. Perhaps even by any statistical methods.

The third is the need for strategic information. While there is a tendency to make much of the "information explosion," it should not be assumed that policy makers, social scientists and others have too much information available concerning certain crucial social

processes. Much of the information currently available is not relevant for policy making purposes.

A final problem is that social data are reported by formal instead of real social units. Census divisions, for example, are commonly used regional demarcations in Alberta; these can in no way be considered as useful functional, economic, physical, or social regions.

#### The problem of valid social measurement and analysis.

Perhaps the most basic dilemma in social research is that in the search for accuracy and precision in measurement there often emerges a disparity between theoretical concept and the operational definition by which it is measured. This is an ever-present problem which is inherent in social science: No single operational measure nor any small set of them can adequately convey all of the aspects of the rather large concepts with which the social sciences must deal.

In addition to the problem of operational definition, there are two other problems of valid social measurement. Both have been mentioned above. The first has to do with taking measurements on formal rather than real social units. The second relates to the problems encountered when attempting to measure a concept with social statistics originally collected for other purposes such as government housekeeping.

As well as problems of measurement, there are two major problems in data analysis and interpretation in the social sciences. The first is the problem of causality or direction of relationships. Most analytic tools available to the social sciences are not appropriate to causal analysis. The second is the difficulty of



intervening variables -- is the observed association between two variables attributable to the variables themselves or to some third variable with which they are both associated?

### Some Practical Problems

In any actual attempt to develop a social report for a region several practical issues must be resolved. Some of these issues can be handled quite readily, if somewhat arbitrarily. Others seem particularly intractable; the HRRC experience indicates that they exist and how significant they are, but not how to solve them.

Here five points are made as an illustration of the "practical" in social reporting.

The first relates to the question "How encompassing can a social report be?" In the past decade the concept of a social report has become larger, with macro-perspectives replacing micro-perspectives. Most frameworks, and HRRC's is no exception here, encompass many variables and seek to incorporate the knowledge and methods of all of the social sciences. Yet, in operational terms, defining the boundaries of any inquiry is of crucial significance, for it determines the beginning points in the elaboration of a research design and in the preparation of a social report. This involves answering three related sets of questions. The first set of questions deals with the central interests of policy makers and social scientists -- for example, poverty or equality of opportunity. The second set has to do with what will serve as a starting point -- social goals, individual needs, or social services -- and how the chosen dimension relates to the others. And the third concerns

delimitations on these -- which components of goals and needs, whose needs, what services?

In the exploratory study these questions were resolved with experience. The answer to the first set of questions was to take a holistic a view as possible. In answering the second set, the venture began with individual needs and then the focus was broadened. The third set of questions proved to be the most difficult to answer and, because of the exploratory nature of the study, was left partially unanswered. While such outcomes are acceptable in an exploratory study, more rigorous attempts to prepare a social report will require a tighter definition of the boundaries of the study.

This leads to a second issue. It seems inevitable that the first stage of any social reporting activity will be a period of "muddling through", exploring different avenues (often more than once) in the search for conceptual clarity and operational guidelines. Precisely where the break between this phase and the balance of the exercise should come is difficult to suggest. With the accumulation of experience, however, the length of the period of muddling through should become shorter, although it is doubtful whether it can ever be eliminated entirely.

The third issue has to do with the unit of analysis, whether this be individuals, classes of individuals, or large-scale units such as provinces. Most, though not all, data available are at a high level of aggregation. The social scientist who leans toward the individual end of the scale will have to conduct costly special surveys to obtain the information he wishes. The larger end of the scale will

be taken up by social scientists who endorse it as an approach and by individually-oriented social scientists who cannot afford special surveys.

This issue is difficult to resolve, but perhaps Doris Holleb's good advice will help:

In selecting information for policy questions, first and primary consideration should always be given to the ways in which it will subsequently be used. The use determines not only what information is required but how accurate it needs to be. If analyzed requirements cannot be met, this should not be interpreted as a signal to launch elaborate and expensive statistical programs on the one hand or to curtail social reporting activities on the other. Rather, the process of analysis should help us to identify the issues where the improvement of statistics will make the best contribution to present program needs, and to use data, already available, more effectively in combination with unqualified observations.<sup>11</sup>

The fourth issue has already been touched upon but deserves separate mention because of its special significance: "What are data?" "What data are good enough?" "What can be done with data that are not good enough?" "How far might a social scientist "move beyond" his data?" These questions are answered differently by different individuals and the answers are not entirely dependent upon social scientific training or expertise. In practice, it can be most difficult to resolve conflicting points of view on these questions.

Finally, there is the issue of the almost inevitable trade-off between rigor of analysis and simplicity of communication. All policy research should be regarded as a part of a public intelligence system, and that all participants in the policy process -- politicians, civil servants, interest groups, indeed all of the people -- ought to have access to and be able to understand all



relevant information. Thus, social reports must be addressed to a broad audience. Although part of the issue can be resolved by preparing different reports for different audiences, in the final analysis this will lead to sacrificing (at least in some reports) rigors of analysis in favor of simplicity of communication. As already mentioned, such a problem should be resolvable; the difficulty is that, in practice, how to do it is not yet known.

### Concluding Note

If such problems confront those preparing a social report, what then of the users of a social report? What problems will he confront if policy is formulated on the basis of findings drawn from weak measurements which leave important aspects of social concepts untouched?

To say that a tool, like social science, has limitations is not to say that the tool is worthless. The social scientist should be alert to these limitations and conduct his work in such a way that it is as good as it can be under the circumstances and that it might constantly improve. The policy maker should use the results of any exercise in social reporting cautiously and, at the same time, provide the support which will be required if social reporting is to develop as a useful form of social inquiry.

### SUMMARY

This chapter has tried to capture the principal features of HRRC's first exploratory study of social reporting and to outline some of the chief lessons learned, or reinforced, during that study. In essence, the study was described as a kind of "muddling through".

Social reporting was portrayed as more art than science, and as a highly uncertain art at that. And the task of preparing a social report was shown as pulling together ideas and information from a variety of sources and tempering them with intuition and judgement. I hope that these emphases provide a good basis for what follows -- a proposed framework for social reporting in Alberta and an orientation for future developmental work.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>*The Alberta Human Resources Research Council Act.* R.S.A. 1967. c.36.
- <sup>2</sup>G.P. Murdock and others. *Outline of Cultural Materials* (fourth revised edition). New Haven, Conn.: Human Relations Area Files, Inc. 1961.
- <sup>3</sup>R. Armit. *Employment and Income in Alberta, 1970.* Edmonton: The Human Resources Research Council, 1972.
- <sup>4</sup>E.J. Ingram and L.W. West. *A Review of Educational Opportunity: Alberta, 1970.* Edmonton: The Human Resources Research Council, 1971.
- <sup>5</sup>L.E. Larson. *The Family in Alberta.* Edmonton: The Human Resources Research Council, 1971.
- <sup>6</sup>K. Lederer. *A Review of Poverty in Alberta.* Edmonton: The Human Resources Research Council, 1972.
- <sup>7</sup>V. Matthews. *Socio-Legal Statistics in Alberta.* Edmonton: The Human Resources Research Council, 1972.
- <sup>8</sup>L.W. Downey. *Alberta, 1971: Toward a Social Audit.* Edmonton: The Human Resources Research Council, 1972.
- <sup>9</sup>Y. Dror. *Public Policy Making Re-examined.* San Francisco: Chandler, 1968.
- <sup>10</sup>For a discussion of privacy in relation to social reporting see T. McVeigh, *Social Indicators*, Monticello, Ill.: Council of Planning Librarians, 1971. CPL Exchange Bibliography #215.
- <sup>11</sup>D.B. Holleb. *Social and Economic Information for Urban Planning.* Chicago, Ill.: The Center for Urban Studies, the University of Chicago, 1969, p. 60.



## CHAPTER THREE

### A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL REPORTING

The current state of the art of social reporting is under-developed.<sup>1</sup> There is little agreement on a definition of a "social report" or of "social indicators." Few measures of social change, let alone of social progress or retrogression, are available. There is no fully satisfactory theory of social reporting.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find a high level of contentions, seemingly ad hominem debate about social reporting:

What should be measured? How?

Exhortations for action are countered with the plea "let's look before we leap!"<sup>2</sup>

Should concern be exclusively with outputs? Or process? Or with some combination of the two?

Such limitations on social reporting are real. Are they reasons to dismiss social reporting, if only for the time being? Or are the debated reasons to be regarded as helping to define what social reporting is and how it may be strengthened? The point of view here is closest to the latter position.

It is quite possible that the main bottlenecks in the further development of social reporting are two: knowing what to measure and how; and beginning the process of development in order to understand and resolve some of the formidable conceptual and methodological problems of social reporting. These two bottlenecks are the concern of the balance of this paper. What follows is intended to suggest a set of strategies for studying social reporting and its problems so

as to discover what matters most in developing a grounded approach to social reporting.

This Chapter presents a framework for systematic thinking about social reporting. The framework is highly tentative, designed to be tested and to be reconstructed with use. The framework is based on two convictions:<sup>3</sup> first, to analyze complex social problems, social scientists must move away from simplistic, one-dimensional, causal empiricism and try to understand the complexities and inter-dependencies of those problems; and second, a fully useful social report must be based on tested conceptualizations of social conditions.

The final chapter of this paper is concerned with cautious "doing". It concerns learning about social reporting by doing, by seeking conceptual clarity and adequate methodology through sustained developmental efforts. To be sure, there will be many failures, and only occasional successes, but at this stage there is more to be learned from them than from speculation and armchair controversy.

### A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK<sup>4</sup>

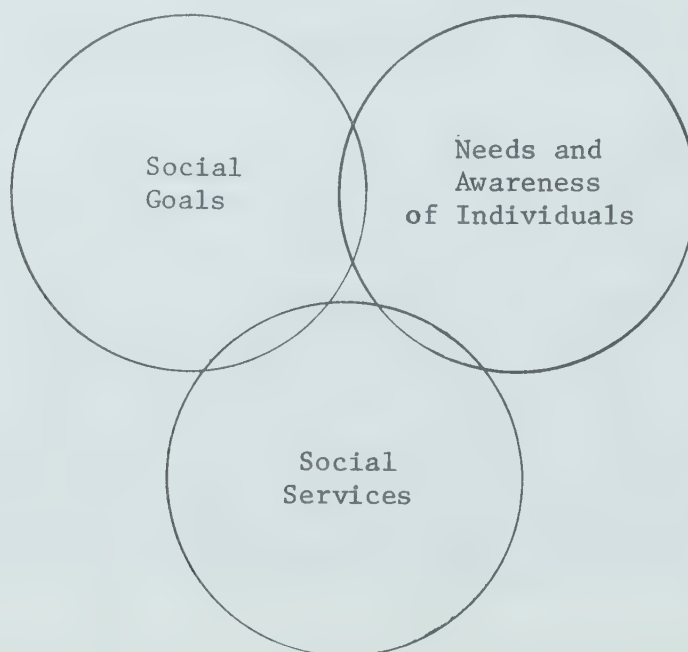
The development of a framework for a system of social reporting involves three quite different but essentially complementary objectives.

The first is "pragmatic": to develop an approach to social reporting which will be as useful as possible in policy making. This suggests several conditions. The framework of a report and the results of the research should be readily communicable to, or translatable for policy makers. The framework should be testable. The framework of a social report should reflect policy needs and realities and should be useful for generating information which can

be used to inform policy choice. Here we will focus briefly on the last condition as an introduction to the structure of the framework.

Policy-informing research must, by definition, generate information and knowledge which can be useful in matters of policy choice. Experience suggests that a framework for policy-informing research, in this case social reporting, should consist of at least three principal components: (1) a social goals component which would include concern for operationalizing general goals; (2) an individual component which would focus on the needs and aspirations of individuals *and* on their awareness of means to satisfy their needs and achieve their aspirations; and (3) a social services component which would look at the way in which services contribute to achieving social goals and meeting individual needs, the determinants of their performance, their costs, and their responsiveness to social goals and individual needs.<sup>5</sup>

These components can be examined singly or in pairs, but the full power of the framework is to be found in the examination of the three simultaneously.





An example outlining the research questions which can be posed within this rudimentary framework should help to clarify the framework itself. Suppose that policy makers need an examination of equal educational opportunity. The framework suggests a number of questions to guide research. *Concerning goals:* What are the purposes of education? education for its own sake? for cultural development? for economic growth? for what social mobility? What is educational opportunity? a right? a privilege? What is *equal* educational opportunity? an equal amount of education for everyone? What means are valued to achieve equal opportunity? compulsion? easy access to services? And what are present conditions?

*Concerning individuals:* What are the motives of individuals regarding education? education for self-fulfillment? for vocational preparation? To what level of attainment do they aspire? elementary education? secondary education? post-secondary education? life-long education? What are the correlates of individual needs and aspirations? demographic? socio-economic? psychological? How aware are individuals of means to satisfy their needs and achieve their aspirations?

*Concerning social services:* What educational services are available? publicly? privately? What factors determine their performance? cost? location? advertising? How responsive are they? to changing social goals and values? to individual needs? How is the equity-economy problem resolved?

The second objective is "normative": to identify those goals for society and those areas of human need which should be incorporated into the framework. By and large this objective must be approached by political means, by discussion and debate in the

public arena, for the social scientist has no special competence here and should not assume it. Thus, the social scientist's contribution to achieving this objective should be thought of as only one of many.

The third is more "operational": to specify highly abstract concepts in terms of more measurable variables which can provide the best possible indication of movement toward, or away from, a given goal or the satisfaction of a given individual need. This involves both theory and intuition -- theory because of the value of accumulated social scientific understandings, and intuition because of the gaps which exist in our scientific explanations of social and individual life.

Figure 3.1 is an attempt to develop a framework which relates social goals, the needs of individuals, and social services and which successively breaks down a number of highly abstract concepts into more precise components, to the point where relevant indicators can be identified. The framework is intended to be used as an instrument of exploration and discovery; the goals and needs outlined in particular require further examination. It is designed to explore the structure of the problem of deriving social indicators, and to uncover promising leads in the derivation of measures of social performance.

### Sectors in the Framework

In order to encompass the three basic starting points for a system of social indicators -- social goals, the needs of individuals, and social services -- the framework contains three main parts or sectors. The first describes the social system in terms of clusters of social goals such as public order and safety, economic

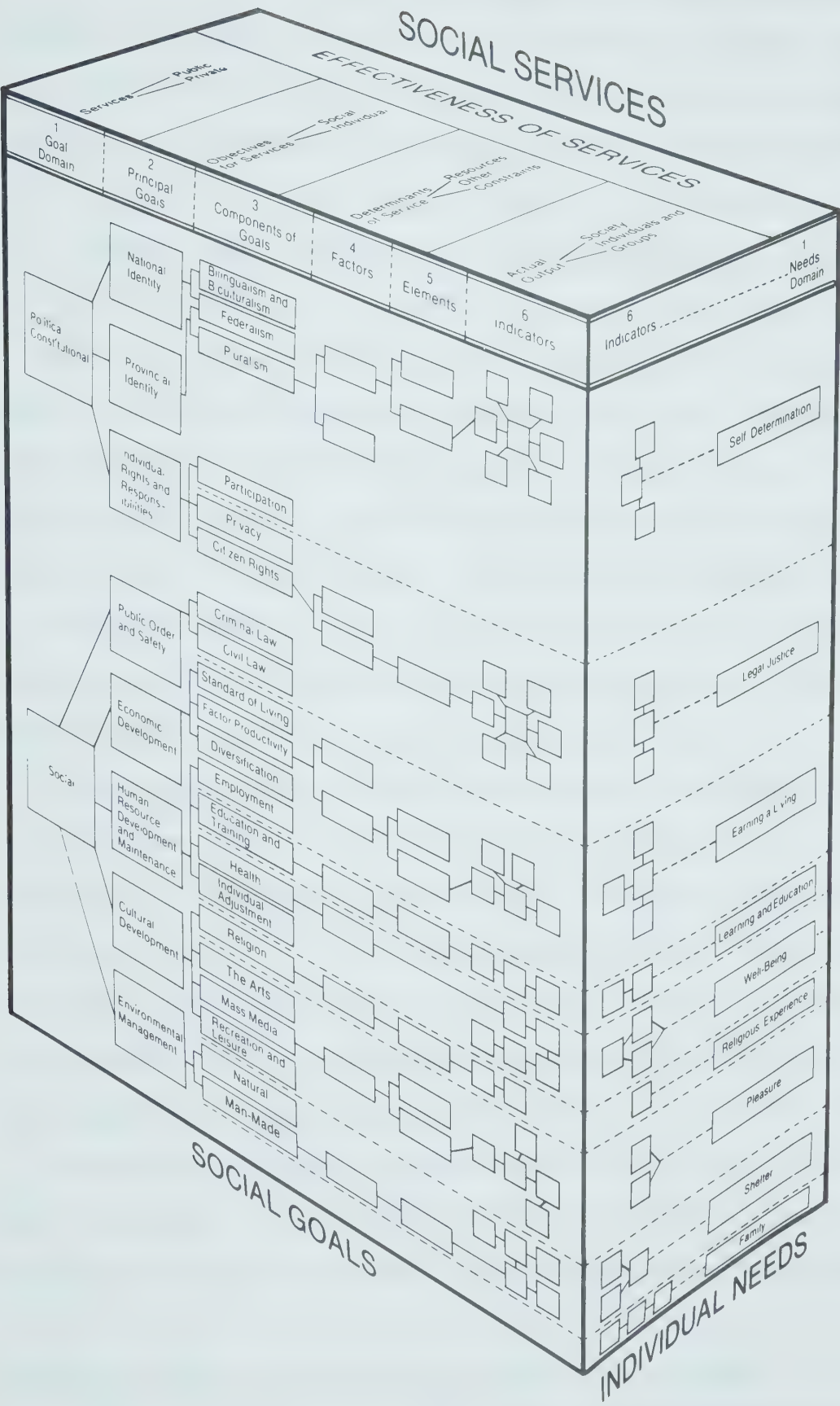


Figure 3.1 A HEURISTIC FRAMEWORK FOR A SOCIAL REPORTING SYSTEM

development, and environmental management. The second outlines a set of roughly parallel concerns of individuals. The third concerns the social services, both public and private, which have been established to help society achieve its goals and satisfy the needs of individuals.

Social goals. A social goal refers to some desired relationship between the society and some aspect of its internal situation (for example, federal-provincial relations) or external situation. It may concern relationships not only to collectivities but also to individuals and to such things as art, the environment, and so on. Goals are not isolated; each is a part of a system of goals and is fitted into the larger system according to its importance and timing in relation to other goals. The attainment of a goal is seldom an all-or-nothing matter; it is usually a matter of degree.

Since the attainment of goals is usually a matter of degree, the possibility of measurement is admitted. Hence, indicators. Here, the concern is with *overall* social movement toward or away from the goals. The unit of analysis is society as a whole; the subject of analysis is a particular goal or goals.

The selection of goals and components of goals for the framework is based largely on an examination of goal statements contained in public documents (such as the *White Paper on Human Resources Development*<sup>6</sup>) and on reports of agencies with a special interest in public policy (the *Annual Reviews* of the Economic Council of Canada<sup>7</sup>, the Canadian Welfare Council's *Social Policies for Canada*<sup>8</sup>, and the like).

When the goals and their components have been identified, available theoretical material should be consulted in a search for



variables with substantial explanatory power, that is, for variables which offered the best reflection of the larger concept. But this theoretical material, though very useful, will not obviate the need for intuition and judgement. In some cases there are significant gaps in theory; often times there are competing theories from which one must choose; much theory is unconcerned with the purposes of social action.

Figure 3.1 contains an outline of the goals and components of goals which grew out of HRRC's exploratory study. It is interesting to note that this outline is remarkable similar to that reported in the Eighth Annual Review of the Economic Council of Canada<sup>9</sup> and that the two outlines were developed independently. The goals incorporated in the framework must be regarded as tentative and in subsequent work on social reporting, these goals may need to be revised in the light of public discussion and debate.

Individual needs. The second sector of the framework identifies a set of individual needs which are *roughly* parallel to the social goals included in the first sector. Here the focus is on the means and ends of individual human behavior. While psychologists often maintain distinctions among individual wishes, desires, wants, aspirations, and the like, for present purposes the general label "individual needs", is adequate.<sup>10</sup>

Like social goals, individual needs may refer exclusively to the individual or to his relationships with other individuals or groups; they are not independent, but exist and are ordered in relation to other individual needs; and their satisfaction is usually a matter of degree and therefore measurable. The measurement concerns are with the degree to which these individual needs are satisfied

and with whether there are group differences in the satisfaction of individual needs.

The identification of individual needs for inclusion in the framework was largely a matter of judgement. The psychology of human motivation is an area of considerable theoretical controversy but little evidence. The framework identifies needs which are roughly parallel to social goals; this seems to be one of the best guidelines for reducing the number of needs which could be examined to manageable proportions.

Figure 3.1 provides an outline of the individual needs which grew out of the exploratory study. They too must be reexamined before subsequent work is undertaken.

Social services.<sup>11</sup> While the above two sectors can be dealt with separately, the power of social reporting as a means of informing policy making depends on relating the two in terms of input from social institutions -- government, education, religion, business -- and output for individuals and groups. For, although such input-output-feedback relationships are exceedingly complex, they are critical, since the ways in which the inputs from social institutions are programmed and managed determine their impact on individuals. It is only when the two sectors are brought together that the basic policy question, "What adjustments are required in the delivery system if the needs of individuals and of society are to be better met?" can be answered.

Thus, the third sector of the framework -- social services. Most societies have delivery systems, both public and private, operating in these areas. The general focus of this component of the model is on the effectiveness of social services in the pursuit

of social goals and the satisfaction of individual needs. More specifically: "What services are available and what are their characteristics?" "What are the determinants of service?" "What do they cost?" "How responsive are the services to changing conditions and to individuals?" "Whom do they serve?"

### Levels in the Framework: The Goals and Needs Sectors

An equally critical problem in the development of social indicators is the process of breaking down social goals and individual needs into their component parts and devising operational definitions of the goals and needs. This problem has three aspects.

The first aspect of this problem is a matter of logic and definition.<sup>12</sup> Operational definitions should be clear and certain; their job is to delimit concepts and make the concepts susceptible to measurement. Yet they also have disadvantages which must be guarded against. Chief among these disadvantages are the following. Operational definitions often do not adequately cover large or rich concepts (how, for example, does one operationally define and measure religious experience?). Similarly, they may not satisfy the researcher's curiosity about the larger concept. When created without reference to theory, operationalizing will result in meaningless measures in which there is no relationship between the concept in question and the variable which is measured. And operational definitions are prone to circularity in that they can simply be another way of expressing the larger concepts. These problems are pervasive in social reporting, indeed in all of social science, and will not be easily resolved. They seriously undermine a social report only when the social reporters work in ignorance of them or handle them arbitrarily.

The second aspect of this problem is theoretical. The process of breaking down goals and needs into their component parts must begin with an examination of available knowledge and theory. To the extent possible, the relationships between goals and their various components and the explanatory powers of specific indicators must be known in advance.

The final aspect of this problem is that the process of breaking down social goals and individual needs into their component parts can be thought of as constituting, essentially, the process of goal setting. This aspect has two basic dimensions. The first is that goals can be set by omission as well as by commission. The very acts of including some goals and excluding others, and of treating some goals as global concerns and others as elements of larger concerns, implies that some goals are more important than others or that certain goals should be viewed as instrumentalities toward others. The second dimension involves the tendency to include in a social report only those goals which can be expressed in operational or measureable terms. These difficulties are inevitable. They are dangerous only when the social scientist is unaware of them or makes decisions about them unwittingly or arbitrarily.

In Figure 3.1 concepts related to social goals are arranged in descending order from the most general to the most specific, and a similar pattern could have been developed for concepts related to the needs of individuals. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the levels of the goals and needs sectors of the model more fully and provide definitions and examples for each level. The substance of the illustrations is "participation"<sup>13</sup>. The examples in Table 3.1 are paraphrased, sometimes rather loosely, from the *White Paper on Human Resources Development*<sup>14</sup>; those in Table 3.2 are hypothetical.



Levels of the Social Goals Sector	I Goal Domain	II Principal Goals	III Components of Goals	IV Factors	V Elements	VI Indicators
Definition	A highly abstract outline of society's goals in a number of related areas	A broad statement encompassing all desired accomplishments in a given area	Statement of general intent to direct accomplishment of particular aspects of a given area	Statement of more specific direction, intent or purpose	Statement outlining factors to be taken into account in achieving the purpose	Example of an activity, accomplishment or product that can be observed and measured that indicates movement toward or away from the specific purposes, measurement at a high level of aggregation
Illustrative Specification of Components	<i>Political/Constitutional</i>	National Identity Provincial Identity <i>Individual Rights and Responsibilities</i>	Participation Self-Expression Privacy Citizen Rights	Social Participation Political Participation <i>Administrative Participation</i>	Information <i>Resource</i> Involvement	Appeals of Administrative Decisions <i>Investigations by the Ombudsman</i>
Examples Paraphrased from the White Paper on Human Resources Development	The governments first concern is with free and creative human beings	Government is resolved to foster a climate characterized by a profound respect for the liberty of individual citizens, associations, and communities	The government commends to all the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and the Canadian "Bill of Rights"	The government will safeguard citizens against unjust administrative action	The government will receive and investigate complaints from citizens	The government will appoint an ombudsman to investigate citizen complaints and report to the Legislature

Table 3.1: LEVELS IN THE FRAMEWORK: THE SOCIAL GOALS SECTOR

Levels of the Individual Needs Sector	I Needs Domain	II Principal Needs	III Components of Needs	IV Factors	V Elements	VI Indicators
Definition	A highly abstract outline of a number of related individual needs	A broad statement encompassing all aspects of a given need	Statement of general concern to direct satisfaction of particular aspects of a given need	Statement of more specific concern	Statement outlining factors to be taken into account in satisfying the need	Example of behavior or condition which can be observed and measured that indicates whether the need is being satisfied. Measurement disaggregated by individual attributes and demographic characteristics
Illustrative Specification of Components	<p><i>Self-Determination</i></p> <p>Conformity to Accepted Norms</p> <p>Freedom from Undue Restraint</p>	<p>Participation</p> <p>Privacy</p> <p>Personal Freedoms</p>	<p>Social Participation</p> <p>Political Participation</p> <p>Administrative Participation</p>	<p>Awareness</p> <p>Recourse</p> <p>Involvement</p>	<p>Appeals of Administrative Decisions</p> <p>Organized Protest</p>	
Examples	Individuals need to be free to live in accordance with their chosen cultural pattern	Individuals need to behave in viable ways within their chosen cultural pattern	Individuals need to participate in activities relating to decisions which affect them	Individuals need to participate in activities relating to administrative decisions which affect them	Individuals need recourse when they feel they have been affected adversely by a decision	Individuals need to be able to appeal to the courts for the redress of felt grievances

Table 3.2: LEVELS IN THE FRAMEWORK: THE INDIVIDUAL NEEDS SECTOR

Several features of the illustrations should be noted. Some of these features have been mentioned before and some will be mentioned again in this paper because of their significance in the preparation of a social report.

First, for the practical reasons mentioned in the previous section of this Chapter, the two sectors are very similar in organization and substance.

Second, notwithstanding this overall similarity the units of analysis in the two sectors are different. In the goals sector the concern is with *overall social* movement; indicators are measures at a very high level of aggregation. In the needs sector the focus is on the *distribution of needs satisfaction* among individuals and groups; indicators are measures relating to individual or group attributes and demographic characteristics<sup>15</sup>.

Third, the number of levels in the framework should not be regarded as fixed. In the illustrations, the six levels were appropriate for breaking down the concept of participation. In other cases, the number of levels might be either more or less, depending upon the concept of interest.

Fourth, participation, like so many other social and individual concerns, can be regarded as both an end in itself and a means to other ends. In the illustrations, participation is treated as an end and appears at Level III. If other illustrations had been chosen participation could be treated as a means and would appear at a lower level, say V or VI<sup>16</sup>.

This leads to a final point. As one moves from the higher to the lower levels of abstraction, one approaches the question of means, for the more specific goals often imply means for attaining the general goals.

## The Components of the Services Sector<sup>17</sup>

The services sector of the framework is not broken down in the same way as the goals and needs sectors. Here the focus is on the effectiveness of social services in relation to social goals and individual needs and on the factors which determine their effectiveness -- on input and output in relation to social and individual requirements.

From the point of view of policy makers this sector may well be the most crucial of the three, for it deals most directly with the economic, political and administrative questions noted in Chapter One. Yet this sector is also the most difficult to illustrate graphically in Figure 3.1 since the array of information, relating to public and private social services can be bewildering. This difficulty, and not any downgrading of the importance of the social services sector, accounts for the illustration not indicating any logical relationship between social goals or individual needs and social services.

Again using "participation" as the example, the basic research question is then "Do available procedures for participation (e.g., the universal franchise, the office of the ombudsman, writing letters to legislators, and membership in voluntary organizations) result in rates and effectiveness of participation which satisfy the requirements of defined social goals and individual needs?"

There are a number of related questions which must be answered before any judgement on this larger question can be made. The related questions include the following:

"What regularized procedures for participation exist?"

A public information service? Tribunals for the appeal of



administrative decisions? An ombudsman's office? Political party organizations? Universal suffrage?

"What objectives are held for these services?" Maximum participation? Open access to channels of participation for all who desire it?

"What are the requirements for achieving these objectives?" Compulsory participation? Active encouragement of participation? Support for individual attempts at participation?

"Do available resources enable these requirements to be met?" How are discrepancies between requirements and resources resolved?

"What constraints are placed on individual participation?" Legal constraints such as voter qualifications? *De facto* constraints such as high cost or geographic remoteness? Are services responsive to the requirements of individual cases?

The domain of inquiry represented by these questions can be shown in tabular form. Suppose that the issue at hand is "administrative participation". Using the above questions as a guide, a table such as Table 3.3 can be constructed and used for assembling information.

Answers to these questions, when combined with information generated in the other two sectors of the framework -- information about overall participation and about individual and group differences in participation -- should enable making informed judgements about the question of the effectiveness of services in relation to their cost.

Function of Social Services for Administrative Participation					
	Service to Society				
	INVOLVEMENT Nature & Extent Cost				
	RECOURSE Nature & Extent Cost				
	AWARENESS Nature & Extent Cost				
	INVOLVEMENT Nature & Extent Cost				
	RECOURSE Nature & Extent Cost				
Service to Individuals					
AWARENESS Nature & Extent Cost					
AWARENESS Nature & Extent Cost					
AWARENESS Nature & Extent Cost					
AWARENESS Nature & Extent Cost					
AWARENESS Nature & Extent Cost					
A G E N C I E S					
PUBLIC					
1. Administrative Tribunals					
2. Courts					
3. Human Rights Association					
4. Ombudsman					
PRIVATE					
1. Legal Aid Society					
2. Social Action Groups					

TABLE 3.3: THE SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR: A MATRIX FOR ANALYSIS

### Choosing Indicators

One of the most troublesome operational problems in social reporting is choosing indicators. Which operational definition and which measures best represent a larger concept? What data is to be gathered?

There are no easy answers available to these questions. Theory can sometimes help. So too can empirical inquiry and tools (analysis of variance techniques come to mind here). And so can trial and error, discussion with policy makers, and the like. In the final analysis, however, it remains at this time largely a matter of debate and judgement.

### Assessing Attainment

Since the ultimate emphasis of social reporting is on the evaluation of social progress or retrogression, an obvious requirement is to devise an approach for measuring the degree to which the goals have been achieved and the needs satisfied. Like most of the other problems examined, this one also has more than one dimension.

The first dimension of this problem is that evaluation requires the setting of standards by which to measure progress toward, or retrogression from, the realization of social goals or the satisfaction of individual needs. In Chapter One it was noted that three general kinds of standards might be used, one of them absolute and the other two relative. In terms of the participation example, then, an absolute standard of, say, electoral participation, could involve specifying a particular level of voter turnout in provincial elections as desirable or, alternatively, constructing a scale with

three or four ranges -- grossly inadequate, inadequate, adequate, and superior<sup>18</sup>. One of the relative standards could be voter turnout in another selected province, other provinces, or all provinces; the latter seems preferable because it permits ranking and avoids the bias of selection. The other relative standard could be voter turnouts in the province's elections over time, with the implication that the performance of the past is either desirable or to be improved upon.

It is not clear which of the three approaches to setting standards is best; indeed it does not seem likely that any one approach can satisfy all requirements. Absolute standards (such as Canada's unwritten but seldom questioned standard for "full employment" set at 4 per cent of the labor force unemployed) have the advantages of committing energy and resources to their achievement -- but they are difficult to define and to secure consensus on and they may become outmoded. Relative standards are more easily operationalized, but beg the question of what other place or time is to be the standard of comparison (which place is to be Alberta's standard of comparison -- Ontario, Canada as a whole, Newfoundland, some state in the U.S.A., a European country?) and can be manipulated to show conditions in the worst or best possible light. This is a recurring issue in politics as well as in social reporting and cannot be resolved here. We can only indicate *our* preference for properly used relative standards.

The other dimension of this problem concerns the development of overall measures of social performance or needs satisfaction. The temptation to weight and then sum all indices to some total measure is understandable. Nevertheless, it should be avoided for



to do so would greatly overrepresent contemporary social reporting. The current state of the art does not justify the development of overall measures.

### The Problem of Consensus

A principal concern in all social policy research is the examination of values and valuing, of setting goals and establishing attainment levels. But which goals and attainment levels? And whose? These are the problems of consensus.

The problems of consensus are of particular significance to social reporting. For the structure of a social report depends on identifying various public interests, on examining them, and then on selecting some set of goals and standards which represents some consensus, some unified cluster of social preferences.

There are at least three general approaches to consensus within a social report which can result from these processes of goal identification, examination, and selection, whether these processes are carried forward through science, politics or both.

The first approach is to base the social report and its indicators on politically visible themes. There are two dangers inherent in this approach. The first is that although consensus on high-level goals may exist, the more operational statements may diverge considerably. An excerpt from Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative*, demonstrates this point nicely:

*I agree with lobbyists for federal school aid that education is one of the great problems of our day. I am afraid, however, that their views and mine regarding the nature of the problem are many miles apart. They tend to see the problem in quantitative terms -- not enough school, not enough leaders, not enough equipment. I think it has to do with quality: How good are the schools we have? Their solution is to spend more money. Mine is to raise*

*standards. Their recourse is to the federal government. Mine is to the local public school board, the private school, the individual citizen -- as far away from the federal government as one can possibly go.*<sup>19</sup>

A similar danger is to think of social problems in terms of the people most immediately involved rather than in the context of the whole community. Thus, for example, thinking of discrimination against Native Peoples in Canada only in terms of its immediate impact on the Native Peoples themselves is to ignore the consequences of racial discrimination in the larger society.

The second approach, in many respects opposite to the first, involves basing the social report and indicators on enduring social problems, problems whose importance has been demonstrated by history. Some of the potential consequences of this -- ignoring existing conditions and discounting social trends too readily -- are also dangerous. Indeed, in a pragmatic sense, politically visible themes or issues of the moment can provide a more effective place to begin the actual work of preparing a social report.

A third approach, which seems more useful and productive, is to assemble goals and indicators that represent a range of possibilities:

*One might seek out some indicators dealing with the problems of existing institutions (like unemployment), and others that measure concerns nearer the horizon of possibilities (like the degree to which work is a creative and fulfilling process for people). Indicators that cover the entire span can help to show both where the most current, pressing problems lie and how rapidly the nation is moving toward longer-range objectives.*<sup>20</sup>

In short, while subjective judgements about social goals and standards of performance cannot be eliminated entirely, excessive subjectivity can be controlled through a balanced approach to social

reporting. That is, an approach which establishes parity over a wide range of social concerns and which enable researchers and policy makers to identify the underlying structure of social problems as well as their highly visible symptoms. Both require a high level of understanding of individuals, the social system, and the interactions among its component parts.

### Summary Comments

To summarize briefly, this section has examined the problem of structuring a social report, not so much in terms of its subject matter, but rather in terms of the problems which need to be resolved in preparing a framework for a social report. In particular, an attempt was made to demonstrate that a social report is based on values and goals, that a social report must be designed to be useful to policy makers, and that social reporting rests on the resolution of a great many political, theoretical and empirical questions.

The structure for social reporting which has been developed here is, in effect, a model of society with three components: (1) a set of social goals and desired attainment standards for each goal; (2) a parallel set of individual needs and desired satisfaction levels for each need; and (3) a services component which raises questions concerning the effectiveness of social programs in relation to stated goals and needs. The information generated within such a framework, if generated correctly, should be useful for assessing present social conditions and evaluating social progress or retrogression.

## THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SOME CAVEATS

So much for the moment about the components of the conceptual framework. Three general points about the framework need to be made by way of warning to the reader and to emphasize what the framework is *not*.

First, readers should not read too much into the term "indicators". No single-variable or even multi-variable measure of a concept can be equated with the concept itself. Concepts are too large and variables too small and numerous to achieve complete correspondence between concepts and variables. Thus indicators must be regarded as part measures or incomplete representations of concepts.

The first caveat has an important derivative -- the central feature of the framework and other approaches to social reporting at this time is the *attitude* they convey about policy-informing research -- about the need to relate research to policy requirements, about the need for improved measures of social progress or retrogression, about the need for broader perspectives in research, and so on. To look for too much more from social reporting at this time does not seem warranted.

Finally, the framework does not mention explicitly such basic and important social processes as planning, the discovery of new knowledge, or such improvement through the application of technology. This is not intended to downgrade these processes. They are crucial. In part, they are incorporated into the social services sector of the framework. But more importantly, they are of an order different from social reporting, and come either before it or after it in the policy-making cycle.



CONCLUDING NOTE

This Chapter has outlined an approach to policy-informing research through social reporting, some of the limitations of social reporting, and some difficulties with research of this kind.

Social reporting is one of the most promising forms of policy-informing research. Realities being what they are, it will not be possible, in the foreseeable future, to achieve the ideal social report. Social reporting being what it should be, a way to perform the vital function of informing policy making, this work should not be given up or allowed to lose sight of the ideal because of its difficulties.

# NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>See D.M. Plessas and R. Fein. An Evaluation of Social Indicators. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. January, 1972. 43-51.
- <sup>2</sup>See, for example: Dorothy Walters. *Social Intelligence and Social Policy*, paper presented at the Canadian Council on Social Development's Seminar on Social Indicators, Ottawa, January 13, 1972, and the response by Gail Stewart, *On Looking Before Leaping*.
- <sup>3</sup>These convictions are best expressed and exemplified in *Urban Canada: Problems and Prospects*, A Report Prepared by N.H. Lithwick for the Honorable R.K. Andras, Minister Responsible for Housing, Government of Canada, Ottawa, 1970.
- <sup>4</sup>In parts of this section I have drawn from the conceptual work of the Educational Policy Research Center, *op. cit.*
- <sup>5</sup>This point of view has since been supported persuasively by M. Rein, "Social Policy Analysis and the Interpretation of Beliefs," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, September, 1971, 297-310.
- <sup>6</sup>E.C. Manning, Premier of Alberta. *A White Paper on Human Resources Development*. Edmonton, Alberta, 1967.
- <sup>7</sup>Economic Council of Canada, *Annual Reviews 1-8*. Ottawa: The Council, 1964-1971. See especially: *Economic Goals for Canada to 1970* (1964); *The Challenge of Growth and Change* (1968); *Perspective 1975* (1969); and *Design for Decision-Making -- An Application to Human Resources Policies* (1971).
- <sup>8</sup>The Canadian Welfare Council. *Social Policies for Canada, Part 1*. Ottawa: The Council, 1969.
- <sup>9</sup>Economic Council of Canada. *Design for Decision-Making -- An Application to Human Resources Policies*, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-70.
- <sup>10</sup>On this question see B. Berelson and G.A. Steiner, *Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964, pp. 239-241.
- <sup>11</sup>The idea of social institutions as systems for "delivering" certain goods to individuals is worth pondering on. It is also a matter on which agreement is difficult to reach. Structuralists, functionalists, structural functionalists, and systems analysts all look on the matter differently. The point of view here is generally that of systems analysis.

- <sup>12</sup>An excellent although difficult treatment of this and other problems can be found in G. Nettler, *Explanations*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970, pp. 8-32.
- <sup>13</sup>The theoretical basis of our illustration is drawn from J.V. May, *Citizen Participation: A Review of the Literature*. Monticello, Illinois: Council of Planning Librarians, 1971. Exchange Bibliography 210-211.
- <sup>14</sup>E.C. Manning, Premier of Alberta. *Op. cit.*, pp. 47-52.
- <sup>15</sup>This is similar to, but not identical with, the Economic Council of Canada's idea of "goal output indicators". See it's *Design for Decision-Making -- An Application to Human Resources*, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-74.
- <sup>16</sup>The fact that a single activity can serve as both means or end can be troublesome in social reporting. While it is a problem that cannot be easily solved, it is nevertheless possible through careful conceptualization and definition. R.A. Dahl and L. Lindblom's *Politics, Economics and Welfare* (New York: Harper, 1963) illustrates the possibilities.
- <sup>17</sup>Much of this is based on May, *op. cit.* and S. Drabel and J.T. Woods, *Selected Aspects of Political Opportunity in Alberta*, a working paper presented at the Alberta Human Resources Research Council's Symposium on Social Opportunity in Alberta, Edmonton, April 9-12, 1969.
- <sup>18</sup>Such an approach is advocated, for example, by the Educational Policy Research Center, *op. cit.*
- <sup>19</sup>B. Goldwater. *The Conscience of a Conservative*. New York: McFadden Books, 1964.
- <sup>20</sup>Educational Policy Research Center, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL REPORTING: THE PRACTICAL

The ideas of social reporting, like ideas in any other field of inquiry, must be adapted to real problems if they are to be of any practical use in policy making. This adjusting and fitting of general ideas to a particular situation is a very important part of the uncertain art of social reporting.

Throughout this paper a number of ideas and concerns about social reporting have been discussed. In this last Chapter of the paper, attention is turned to general postures and strategies for improving social reporting. The Chapter is a final statement of the case for sustained developmental efforts in social reporting.

#### A NOTE ON PRESENT PROBLEMS AND FUTURE REQUIREMENTS

The process of developing any form of inquiry is a continuing cycle of model or theory building, and hypothesis formulation, testing and amendment. Schwab has described the process in the following way:

*. . . any intellectual discipline must begin its endeavors with untested principles. In its beginnings, its subject matter is relatively unknown, its problems unsolved, indeed, unidentified. It does not know what questions to ask, what other knowledge to rest upon, what data to seek or what to make of them once they are elicited. It requires a preliminary and necessarily untested guide to its enquiries. It finds this guide by borrowing, by invention, or by analogy, in the shape of a hazardous commitment to the character of its problems or its subject matter and a commitment to untried canons of evidence and rules of enquiry. What follows these commitments is years of their application, pursuit of the mode of enquiry demanded by the principles to which the field has committed itself. To the majority*



*of practitioners of any field, these years of enquiry appear only as pursuit of knowledge of its subject matter or solution of its problems. They take the guiding principles of the enquiry as givens. These years of enquiry, however, are something more than pursuit of knowledge or solution of problems. They are also tests, reflexive and pragmatic, of the principles which guide the enquiries. They determine whether, in fact, the data demanded by the principles can be elicited and whether, if elicited, they can be made to constitute knowledge adequate to the complexity of the subject matter, or solutions which, in fact, do solve the problems with which the enquiry began.*

*In the nature of the case, these reflexive tests of the principles of enquiry are, more often than not, partially or wholly negative, for, after all, the commitment to these principles was made before there was well-tested fruit of enquiry by which to guide the commitment. The inadequacies of principles begin to show, in the case of theoretical enquiries, by failures of the subject matter to respond to the questions put to it, by incoherencies and contradictions in data and in conclusions which cannot be resolved, or by clear disparities between the knowledge yielded by the enquiries and the behaviors of the subject matter which the knowledge purports to represent. In the case of practical enquiries, inadequacies begin to show by incapacity to arrive at solutions to the problems, by inability to realize the solutions proposed, by mutual frustrations and cancellings out as solutions are put into effect.<sup>1</sup>*

Social policy research and social reporting are new forms of inquiry -- they have received serious attention only within the last five to ten years. Almost all of the work to date has been speculative, concerned with general principles and models for social reporting; few attempts to produce a social report, however modest, have been made.

What has yet to occur in social reporting is a commitment to the second stage of development -- a commitment to application and to the test of principles and models. It seems clear that if social reporting is to be examined further and encouraged to evolve, then such a second commitment is required.

Moreover, an increasing amount of evidence suggests that a commitment to application and test can, indeed should, be made soon. Much of the current work is moving away from the field of application, from theory to meta-theory, from social indicators to master social indicators, and so on. There is a growing redundancy in the literature, a too-frequent repetition of now familiar speculations about social reporting. The level of debate about social reporting is growing more contentious without resolving any of the concerns being examined. All of these points and others suggest a willingness to *talk* about social reporting, to accept or reject it on the basis of unproven assertions, rather than to *test* it and to *demonstrate* its usefulness or lack of it. Without sustained developmental tests, these conditions will lead to skepticism and rejection from without and to dissatisfaction and abandonment from within.

And so we come to what Schwab calls the "practical" and the "arts of the eclectic" as means for moving beyond preliminary theorizing to the actual problems of social reporting:

*There are practical arts concerned with particulars of the practical omitted by theory. There are eclectic arts concerned with the incompleteness of each subject of the behavioral sciences. There are other eclectic arts which select among, adjust, and sometimes combine the incomplete views which constitute the plurality of the theories generated in each behavioral science.<sup>2</sup>*

The practical persuasion in social reporting will be difficult to live by, for it is a complex undertaking, unfamiliar and even discomforting to academics and still far from the everyday "common sense" of policy makers content with familiar goals and familiar means for achieving them. It will share all of the problems which characterize science as well as some of the perennial problems of policy making. Mistakes, errors, and frustrations will exist all

along the way. Problems will be easy to identify but difficult to resolve.

These are undoubtedly tasks of major importance:

*The improvement of...social statistics is a slow, painful and expensive process. It takes long planning and great care to make major changes. Small wonder that our friends the policy-makers become impatient with us. They must make decisions now. Better statistics 5 years from now are of no help at all in making the decisions that must be made today. And yet the statistics of today are as good as they are because 5 years ago some policy-maker was frustrated by lack of relevant information, or because some statistician was<sup>3</sup> foresighted enough to anticipate future needs.*

Can this work be done? It simply must.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has described an attack on the problem of social reporting which sets out to combine one of the most promising tools of modern social science with many of the hard realities of policy making. But, what if they cannot be combined in practice? What if natural obstacles to rationalizing public policy making prove to be insurmountable? What if social science fails to follow through its early promise?

Some failures, at least, are inevitable -- but one can sometimes learn more from them than from successes. The process of developing any form of enquiry, and social policy research is no exception to the rule, is a continuing cycle of theory building and hypothesis formulation, refutation, and amendment. It is to be hoped that better theories and more accurate tools will gradually become available. Much depends on better data, creative scholarship and stimulating speculation. But it should not be forgotten that,

in the words of Jan Tinbergen, "the role to be played by scientific knowledge and insight in the field of (public) policy will for a long time to come be only a modest one."<sup>4</sup> The important features of social life are too numerous and diverse to make policy decisions without a strong intuitive feeling for human beings, their capacities, and their problems.



NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>J.J. Schwab. "The Practical: A Language for the Curriculum." *The School Review*, November, 1969, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>2</sup>J.J. Schwab. "The Practical: Arts of Eclectic." *The School Review*, August, 1971, p. 503.
- <sup>3</sup>Albert Rees. "Statistical Needs for Setting Policy," *U.S. Monthly Labor Review*, September, 1971, p. 45.
- <sup>4</sup>J. Tinbergen. *The Design of Development*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1958, p. 69.





